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Online battles

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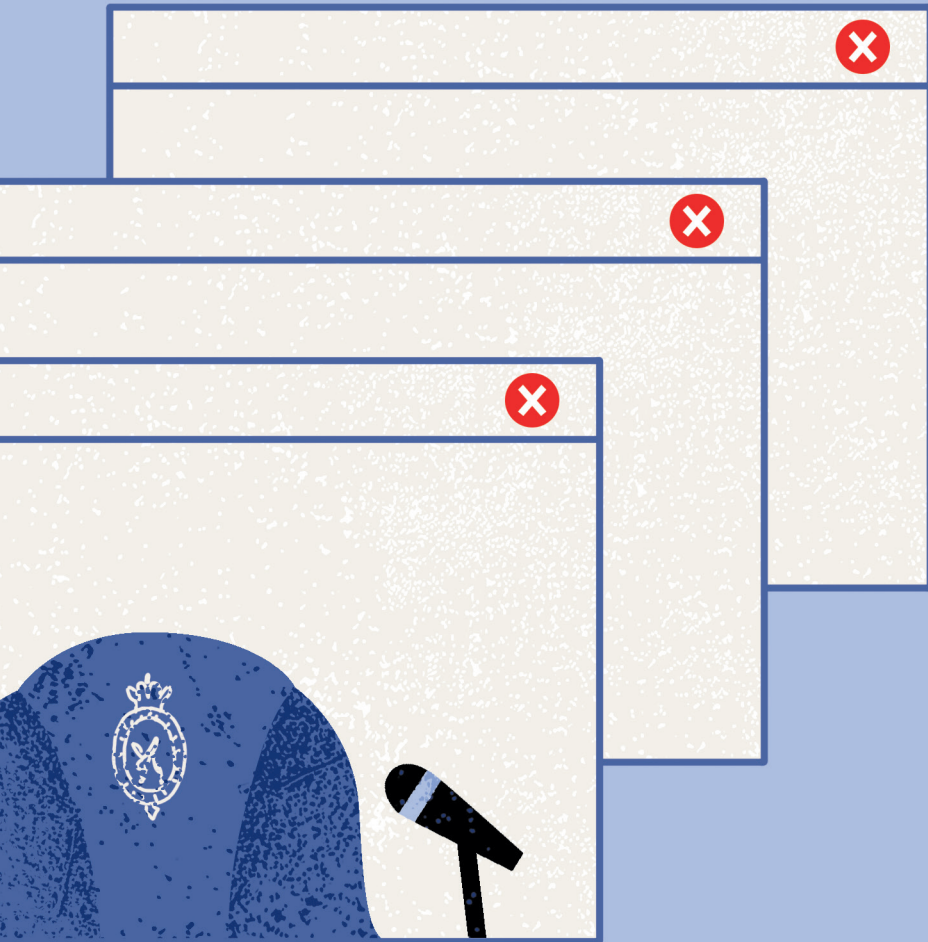
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APPENDICES

References

Nederlandse samenvatting

English summary

Author contributions

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Nederlandse samenvatting

In het huidige digitale medialandschap maken politieke partijen en politici vaak gebruik van sociale media om in contact te komen met het algemene publiek. Om op te vallen en de interesse van het publiek te wekken, maken ze daarbij gebruik van conflictframes – waarin zij oppositie met andere partijen benadrukken, hun tegenstanders aanvallen, of hun politieke agenda vergelijken met die van hun rivalen. Uit bestaand onderzoek blijkt dat de gevolgen van deze nadruk op conflict gemengd zijn. Enerzijds worden er positieve effecten gevonden, bijvoorbeeld dat conflicten lastige politieke kwesties verduidelijken en de betrokkenheid van burgers bij de politiek versterken. Anderzijds wijst onderzoek ook op mogelijke negatieve effecten, zoals toenemend politiek cynisme en burgers die juist afhaken van de politiek. Een mogelijke reden voor dit tegenstrijdige bewijs kan zijn dat onderzoek zich heeft gericht op verschillende aspecten van conflict of gebruik heeft gemaakt van verschillende conceptualisering, waardoor er te weinig rekening is gehouden met de mogelijkheid dat verschillende soorten conflicten andere effecten kunnen hebben. Bovendien is het huidige onderzoek naar de effecten van conflicten versnipperd over verschillende gebieden, zoals politieke communicatie, politicologie, en politieke epistemologie. Om een antwoord te bieden op deze tegenstrijdige bevindingen en om de uiteenlopende literatuur over conflict met elkaar te verenigen, onderzoekt dit proefschrift hoe en waarom politici conflict frames gebruiken, welke verschillende soorten conflict frames er kunnen worden onderscheiden, en hoe deze verschillende soorten conflict frames burgers en democratie beïnvloeden. Om dit te doen maakt dit proefschrift gebruik van paneldata, inhoudsanalyses, experimenten en interviews die allemaal zijn verzameld in de context van het meerpartijenstelsel in Nederland.

Uit eerder onderzoek is al gebleken dat het belangrijk is om onderscheid te maken tussen beschaafde en onbeschaafde conflicten, en tussen conflicten over inhoudelijke kwesties en persoonlijke aanvallen, maar in dit proefschrift wordt beargumenteerd dat het net zo belangrijk is om te kijken naar de diepte en inhoud van conflicten, door onderscheid te maken tussen diepe en gewone conflicten, en tussen normatieve en feitelijke conflicten. Dit proefschrift onderscheidt dus vier dimensies van conflict frames: (1) (on)beleefdheid; (2) het gebruik van persoonlijke aanvallen of niet; (3) diepe versus gewone conflicten; (4) en conflicten over feitelijke versus normatieve kwesties. Deze dimensies hebben betrekking op conflicten die spelen in de huidige digitale samenleving, waarin er een groeiende kloof lijkt te ontstaan tussen feitelijke waarheden en het respect voor politieke tegenstanders lijkt af te nemen. Door onbeschaafde conflicten en conflicten over feiten en epistemologische normen te onderzoeken, krijgen we inzicht in de aanwezigheid van deze conflicten in politieke communicatie en hoe zij de politieke opvattingen en het gedrag van burgers beïnvloeden.

Een analyse van het gebruik van de verschillende dimensies van conflict frames laat zien dat politici op hun sociale media vooral beschaafde en inhoudelijke conflict frames gebruiken. Ook zijn deze conflicten vaak *niet* diepgaand en hebben ze betrekking op normatieve kwesties. Ten aanzien van de gevolgen laat dit proefschrift zien dat conflict frames zelden een significante impact hebben op burgers, noch op een positieve, noch op een negatieve manier. Alleen onder bepaalde voorwaarden kunnen conflict frames een klein negatief effect hebben op de opvattingen en het gedrag van burgers. Als burgers tijdens de verkiezingscampagne worden blootgesteld aan conflict frames van partijen die hen niet aanspreken dan neemt hun intentie om deel te nemen aan laagdrempelige politieke activiteiten in kleine mate af. Ze zijn bijvoorbeeld iets minder geneigd om te discussiëren over de politiek, een petitie te ondertekenen of een politieke website te bezoeken. Verder kan onbeschaafdheid ervoor zorgen dat mensen minder vertrouwen hebben in en minder waardering hebben voor de politieke partij die een onbeschaafd conflict frame gebruikt. Daarnaast kan het gebruik van (diepe) feitelijke conflict frames leiden tot een cynischere houding ten opzichte van de politiek in het algemeen. Deze gevolgen zijn potentieel schadelijk, omdat vertrouwen in de politieke en politieke betrokkenheid van burgers essentieel is voor het functioneren van de democratie. Gelukkig, laat dit proefschrift zien dat de meeste conflicten geen negatieve effecten te weeg brengen.

Ten slotte laat dit proefschrift zien welke impact de mediaomgeving, waarin conflict en negativiteit centraal staan, heeft op het gebruik van conflictframes door politici. Uit kwalitatieve interviews met politici blijkt dat de belangstelling van de media voor negativiteit en conflict wel degelijk invloed heeft op het politieke domein in zijn algemeenheid, maar dat politici zelf het gevoel hebben te kunnen bepalen in hoeverre ze zich hieraan aanpassen. Sommige parlementariërs benadrukken strategisch gebruik van medialogica om politieke invloed uit te oefenen en aandacht naar zich toe te trekken. Anderen proberen de invloed van de media te beperken, en kiezen ervoor om de nadruk te leggen op samenwerking in plaats van conflict, omdat dit naar hun idee politiek succes vergroot. Verschillende factoren, zoals timing, de positie van de partij en de aard van het conflict, hebben ook invloed op deze aanpassing. Deze resultaten laten zien dat de verantwoordelijk voor de aanwezigheid van online conflicten te wijten is aan zowel politici zelf als de media.

In het kort heeft dit proefschrift vier dimensies van politieke conflict frames geïntroduceerd en daarbij inzichten vanuit politieke communicatie, politieke wetenschap en politieke epistemologie samengebracht. Dit proefschrift presenteert de eerste bevindingen ten aanzien van de effecten van deze dimensies, maar benadrukt ook het belang voor verder onderzoek om een duidelijk beeld te krijgen van de genuanceerde effecten van conflict frames.

English summary

In today's digitalized media landscape, political actors often use social media to communicate with the general public. In doing so, politicians often make use of conflict frames - emphasizing opposition, attacking opponents, and contrasting their political agenda with that of their competitors - to capture the interest of the audience. Existing research shows that the consequences of this emphasis on conflict are mixed, ranging from positive effects, such as the simplification of political issues and the engagement of citizens in politics, to negative outcomes, such as increasing political cynicism and disengagement. One possible reason for this inconclusive evidence may be that studies have often focused on different aspects of conflict or used different conceptualisations of it, thereby disregarding that different types of conflict may yield different effects. In addition, research on conflict has been scattered across different fields, including political communication, political science, and political epistemology. To address these inconclusive findings and to reconcile the disparate literature on conflict, this thesis examines how and why politicians use conflict frames, which different types of conflict frames can be identified, and how these different types of conflict frames affect citizens and democracy. To do so, this dissertation draws on panel data, content analyses, experiments, and interview data collected in the context of the Dutch multi-party system.

While previous research has suggested that it is important to distinguish between civil and uncivil conflicts, and between conflicts over substantive issues and personal attacks, this dissertation argues that it is equally critical to consider the depth and substance of conflicts, distinguishing between deep and ordinary conflicts, and between normative and factual conflicts. This dissertation therefore proposes a framework of four dimensions: (1) *incivility*; (2) the use of *personal attacks*; (3) the emphasis on *deep* versus *ordinary* conflicts; (4) and conflicts over *factual* versus *normative* issues. The framework addresses the conflicts faced in our contemporary digital society, where the gap between different groups' factual realities appears to widen, and respect for political opponents is perceived to decline. By examining incivility and conflict frames centred on facts and epistemic norms, the framework provides insights into the presence of these conflicts in politics and how they impact citizens' political attitudes and behaviour.

An investigation into the usage of different dimensions of conflict frames in politicians' online communication shows that politicians predominantly employ civil, substantive, and ordinary conflicts that concern normative issues. Concerning the consequences of the dimensions of conflict framing, this dissertation shows that conflict frames rarely

have a significant impact on citizens, either positively or negatively. However, under certain conditions, conflict frames can slightly harm citizens' attitudes and behaviour. Individuals' intentions to engage in low-effort forms of political participation (e.g., discussing politics, signing a petition, and visiting political websites) are slightly reduced when they are exposed to conflict frames from political parties, they dislike during election campaigns. Furthermore, incivility can cause people to lower their trust and evaluation of the political party that uses an uncivil conflict frame, and using (deep) factual conflict frames has the potential to foster more cynical attitudes towards politics in general. These consequences are potentially harmful because a trusting and actively engaged citizenry is essential for the well-functioning of democracy. Fortunately, this dissertation demonstrates that most conflicts do not impact citizens negatively.

Finally, this dissertation shows how the context of a mediatised environment that focuses on conflict and negativity has an impact on the use of conflict frames by politicians. Qualitative interviews with politicians reveal that while they acknowledge the impact of the negative and conflict-driven media environment on the political domain, their adaptation to it varies. Some parliamentarians make strategic use of media logic to gain political influence or attention. Others try to limit the influence of the media by promoting cooperation to enhance political achievements. Various factors, such as timing, the party's position, and the nature of the conflict, also influence this adaptation. These results show that the responsibility for the presence of online conflict is due to both politicians themselves and the media.

Overall, this dissertation has introduced a multi-dimensional framework for political conflict frames, bridging insights from political communication, political science, and political epistemology. While this dissertation presents an initial investigation into the effects of different dimensions of conflict on citizens and democracy, it suggests that further research is necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced impacts of conflict frames.

Author contributions

This section contains the contribution of authors to the empirical chapters, in order of their contribution. The following authors' initials are referred to: Emma van der Goot (EvdG), Dr. Michael Hamelaers (MH), Prof. dr. Sanne Kruikemeier (SK), dr. Toni van der Meer (TvdM), Prof. dr. ir. Jeroen de Ridder (JdR), and Prof. dr. Rens Vliegthart (RV).

Chapter 1: The online battlefield: How conflict frames in political advertisements affect political participation in a multi-party context.

Conceptualization: EvdG, SK, RV, JdR

Methodology: EvdG, SK, RV

Data collection: EvdG, SK, RV

Data analysis: EvdG

Drafting of the manuscript: EvdG

Review and editing of the manuscript: EvdG, RV, SK, MH, JdR

Chapter 2: Online and offline battles: Usage of different political conflict frames.

Conceptualization: EvdG, SK, JdR, RV

Methodology: EvdG, SK, RV, JdR

Data collection: EvdG

Data analysis: EvdG

Drafting of the manuscript: EvdG

Review and editing of the manuscript: EvdG, SK, JdR, RV

Chapter 3: The impact of online political battles on party evaluations and political cynicism: Evidence from two experiments

Conceptualization: EvdG, SK, RV, JdR

Methodology: EvdG, MH, SK, JdR

Data collection: EvdG

Data analysis: EvdG

Drafting of the manuscript: EvdG

Review and editing of the manuscript: EvdG, MH, RV, SK, JdR

Chapter 4: Do politicians knowingly create conflict to gain media attention? How politicians navigate a mediatized environment characterized by negativity and conflict.

Conceptualization: EvdG, TvdM, MH, RV

Methodology: EvdG, TvdM, MH

Data collection: EvdG, TvdM, RV

Data analysis: EvdG

Drafting of the manuscript: EvdG

Review and editing of the manuscript: EvdG, TvdM, MH, RV

Chapter 5: The desirability of (different) political conflict frames.

Conceptualization: EvdG, MH

Drafting of the manuscript: EvdG, MH

Review and editing of the manuscript: EvdG, MH, JdR

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